Microhistory: Paradox, and Invisibilisation

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18 January 2026

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‘while the text itself remains unchanged, its meanings
change depending on who the
reader happens to be, where they are,
and when and how they are reading it.’

Islam Assa, ‘How literature shapes history’,
in H. Carr and S. Lipscomb, eds.,
What is History Now? (2022), p. 302.

Abstract

Traditional historical thinking remains increasingly unsettled yet, persistent. The singular question in this study is: Can (should) the complex relationship between microhistory, paradox, and the phenomenon of invisibilisation be unravelled?

Humankind's limited understanding of their own conceptual creations and linguistic expressions originate from a worldly created web of life that frame the possibilities and limitations for understanding and explaining the past. The singular and collective roles of the individual as agency have changed remarkably and will continue to do so in everyday life as we go into far futures.

In the above, history-writing is already looking different from that of the early post-1945 period and still historical change is a process not an end. Microhistory had no small role to play in that, and for the foreseeable future. That human visibility as agency, and the paradoxical world creates new spaces and technologies for scientific production of new historical future pasts and their outcomes, will always be context-bound. Context-boundaries paradoxically imply no silo-science.

The paradoxical process of making invisible, but simultaneously to make visible, are binaries the citizen and academia confront as a matter of technologically-driven course of real-life events-based in connected experience. This seems to engender its opposite results because the prevailing microhistorical paradoxes have not been successfully resolved. To better understand future pasts, is to better understand future futures and make it future-proof.

Key words: agency, biography-in-context, clues, context, connectedness, everywhereness, *finis,* going-back-to-go-forward, individual, invisibilisation, microhistory, necessary condition, sufficient condition.

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1. Introductory overview

Historians of all persuasions confront at some point in their research process, Who-, What-Why-, When- and Where-questions. These questions might well be considered as sufficient conditions but they do not meet the requirements of a necessary condition to guarantee satisfactory research outcomes. The point of departure in this study is that *new research into different approaches* will leave traditional thinking provisional, particularly when contemporary microhistory is in close proximity.

The aim of this study is to make a few comments about the intricate relationship between microhistory, paradox and invisibilisation, and how it can be untangled.

Outcomes of any satisfactory research can probably be best evaluated against their original research goals and objectives. Nevertheless, through current historiography, historians can never completely explain the past or the motivations of the individuals that they study, because evidence and known knowledge are in any case partial. Consequently, a satisfactory research outcome is hardly attainable because it might only be a guiding normative research ideal but realistically remains at best a part-achieved empirical result.

Such paradoxical situations cannot be denied. This is because the *praxes* of historical studies of any scope and nature remain complex in both their theories and practices. Consider the following two binaries: First, the writing of microhistory is inextricably linked to reflect on the theory and practice of history; conversely, writing on the theory and practice of history is inextricably linked to reflect on the writing about microhistory. Second binary: paradox drives invisibilisation; conversely, invisibilisation drives paradox.

From the above follow two implications. One implication is that paradoxically-induced controversies emerge when researchers disagree about research methods and their diverse

research outcomes. Another implication is that sufficient conditions for research guarantees are scarce because of the complexity of historical *praxis.* This seems more likely when a research project starts from gap-conditions.[1]

Knowledge gaps are omnipresent in research. Despite their best intentions, historians research and write to fill historiographical areas for improvement but paradoxically while contributing to history, also *produce* history which is inevitably gap-filled. Since historians are always surrounded by paradoxes – those that they study and those that they produce – much of their work attempt to put them into place. Gaps are not end-states but clues for future research – they are context-bound and cannot be absolved.

For the purposes of this study, a paradox is considered as a statement or proposition which appears unproblematic but which is contradictory in nature and can, based on seemingly logical reasoning and acceptable premises, lead to a conclusion that appears logically unacceptable, or imperceptible. That would then be self-contradictory. In short, a paradox is understood as a self-contradictory statement or proposition, such as: 'this statement is false'. Historians avoid accommodating false or paradoxical statements.

A paradoxical situation makes debates about the historical method problematic. For example, Zoltán B. Simon argues that 'dysfunctionality of historical understanding, as we came to know it in the last two centuries',[2] poses questions about the continued relevance of modern historical understanding. This refers to the essence of an existential importance for history. When dysfunctional uncertainty exists about the continued relevance of modern historical understanding, then it becomes necessary to deal with the underlying conditions that drive the dysfunctional understanding of diverse interpretations. Such condition does not

[1] M. Krause, 'Recombining Micro/macro: The Grammar of Theoretical Innovation', Online. (1 Nov. 2012), 1, https://www.academia.edu/87776309/Recombining_micro_macro, accessed 15 Oct. 2022.

[2] Z.B. Simon, 'On the Simultaneous Crisis and Abundance of History', in Z.B. Simon and L. Deile, eds., *Historical Understanding. Past, Present and Future.* (London, New York, Oxford, New Delhi and Sydney: Bloomsburg Academia, 2022), 1, https://www.academia.edu/74792812/Historical_Understanding_Past_Present_and_Future, accessed 20 May 2022.

necessarily equate to the falsification of evidence[3] as reflected in the ever-increasing volume of personalised-research-approach's outcomes.

Microhistory faces the same dilemma. Georg G. Iggers proposed that historiography cannot take factors that are only internal (*emic* conditions: beliefs, values, practices) from itself, into consideration.[4] Since the study of paradoxical challenges are important to theorists of history, their impact become consciously significant when we consider their influences on microhistory in particular when they originate from outside (*etic* conditions: the outsiders' perspective) microhistory. These influences on microhistory range from short statements, polemics, and aphorisms to more comprehensive debates.

If Simon is correct about history being 'doomed to remain motionless', then microhistory is also threatened.[5] This is contestable if one keeps Edward Muir's remarks about 'the "unmoving history" of the dominant groups in the old *Annales* school' in mind.[6] Historiographical literature that shows the diverse language, themes, objects of study, methods used and outcomes reported on, can hardly be characterised as history that is 'not moving.' To emphasise: Microhistory is known for its polyphonic diversity from and for its theory and research outcomes.

Despite diverse vantage points at the centre of historical interpretations that manifest themselves in research outcomes, the scale and scope of how *various pasts* are presented, are

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[3] I.A. Gwinn, 'Towards a Critical Historiography or Orthodox-Revisionist Debates in the Origins of the Cold War: Between the Disciplinary Power and U.S National Identity' (MPhil dissertation, Department of American and Canadian Studies, School of Historical Studies, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, 2009), 58, https://www.academia.edu/90230727/Towards_a_critical_historiography_of_orthodox_revisionist_debates_on_the_origins_of_the_Cold_War_between_disciplinary_power_and_U_S_national_identity, accessed 17 Nov. 202I.

[4] G.G. Iggers*, Historiography in the Twentieth Century. From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge.* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 18.

[5] Z.B. Simon, 'History set Into Motion Again', *Rethinking History (Journal of Theory and Practice)*, 19, 4 (2015), 651, DOI: 10.80/13642529.2014.935118, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2014.936118, accessed 2 Mar. 2019.

[6] E. Muir, 'Introduction: Observing Trifles', in Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero, eds., *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe.* Translated by Eren Branch. Selections from *Quaderni storici.* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), xii.

based on rational decision-making. To complicate matters, historians are usually faced with having to unravel the irrational or emotions of the human behaviour of protagonists. The reality is that 'emotional identification'[7] is often not so visible as one would hope the sources will reveal. Almost a decade ago, Rob Boddice explained that:

> short of exhorting historians to become competent neuroscientists themselves, it does demand that historians of emotions take note of the implications of social neuroscientific research in particular, with a view to capturing the potential of the emotions to unlock the history of experience, and with a mind to unlocking the political importance of work in this area, namely, the shifting ground of what it means —how it feels— to be human.[8]

For his part, Sigurður G. Magnússon justifies how egodocuments that are closely related to human emotions, 'can be applied systematically, revealing unexpected perspectives on his life and demonstrating how integration of diverse sources can open up new perspectives on complex and difficult subjects.'[9] These are pre-dispositional consciousnesses positions which researchers bring into their research outcomes – that is, if we claim and adhere to continue and write history 'how it really was'.

From one perspective there is a greater realisation that traditional histories are not the only way to study the past.[10] From another perspective, historians, much as their protagonists do in their microhistorical narratives, are not passive onlookers onto their lives and that of others as if they have no agency or choices in the matter at hand. Historians of all genres have

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[7] C. Ginzburg, 'The Inquisitor as Anthropologist', in C. Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*. Translated by John and Anne C. Tedeschi, with a new preface. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 142.

[8] R. Boddice, 'The History of Emotions: Past, Present, Future', *Revista de Estudios Sociales* 62: 10-15, https://dx.doi.org/10.7440/res62.2017.02, accessed 21 Dec. 2025.

[9] S.G. Magnússon, *Emotional Experience and Microhistory. A Life Story of a Destitute Pauper Poet in the 19th Century.* (London: Routledge, 2020), https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9780429343155/emotional-experience-microhistory-sigurður-gylfi-magnússon, accessed 21 Dec. 2025.

[10] T. de Oliveira Rodrigues, 'Theory of History and History Historiography: Openings for "Unconventional Histories"', *História Da Historiografia*, 12, 29 (Jan.–Apr. 2019), 97, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332721765_Theory_of_history_and_history_of_historiography_Openings_for_unconventional_historiesDOI: 10.15848/hh.v12i29.1303, accessed 10 May 2022.

always been active participants in their writing, even during the high tide of positivism in the twentieth century when empiricism's objectivity and factual truth claims were at the order of the day. In this regard, Carlo Ginzburg noted we should not have debated 'truth' but rather 'proof'.[11] Many contemporary microhistorians conclude that their research results are supported by an array of examples, about the active, participative, daily lived-experiences of individuals as agency.[12] They consider this as fertile research land to toil in their endeavours to find truth. A recent biography-in-context[13] successfully applied the microhistorical approach and illustrates these characteristics. Whether historians should rather strive for proof than truth, is a normative proposition – paradoxically, they are not mutually exclusive. Research outcomes will be worse off if one is excluded. The position in this study is that historical questions should rather be answered on the basis of evidence – evidence is the information, but proof is the conclusion.

In this study context refers to the everyday political, social, cultural, and economic settings of a specific idea or event in the lives of the citizenry. They are the broader ever-

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[11] T.R. Gundersen, 'On the Dark Side of History', Carlo Ginzburg talks to Trygve Riiser Gundersen'. Translated by J. Basil Cowlishaw. First published in *Samtiden*, 2/2003, 8, (Norwegian version) and *Revista Histórica*, 7 (2003) (Portuguese version), Downloaded from eurozine.com, https://www.eurozine.com/on-the-dark-side-of-history/, accessed 22 Aug. 2021.

[12] J. Ahlskog, *The Primacy of Method in Historical Research. Philosophy of History and the Perspective of Meaning*. (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2021), https://www.academia.edu/43802297/The_Primacy_of_Method_in_Historical_Research_Philosophy_of_History_and_the_Perspective_of_Meaning, accessed 20 May 2022; A. Azmanova, 'Relational, Structural and Systemic Form of Power: The "Right to Justification" Confronting Three Types of Domination', *Journal of Political Power*, 11, 1 (2018), 68, DOI: 10.1080/2158379X.2018.1433757, https://www.tandonline.com/loi/rpow21, accessed 9 May 2022; G.M. Feinman, R.E. Blanton and L.M. Nicholas, 'The Emergence of Monte Albán. A Social Innovation that Lasted a Millennium', in T.L. Thurston and M. Fernández-Götz, eds., *Power From Below in Premodern Societies. The Dynamics of Political Complexity in Archaeological Record.* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2021), https://www.academia.edu/53037504/The_Emergence_of_Monte_Alb%C3%A1n_A_Social_Innovation_That_Lasted_a_Millennium_Gary_M_Feinman_Richard_E_Blanton_and_Linda_M_Nicholas_2021, accessed 22 May 2022; F. Langrognet, 'A Microhistory of Migrants and Their Identifications in a Paris Tenement (1882–1932)' (PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, 2018), 17; M.M. Manchester, *Puritan Family and Community in the English Atlantic World. Being "Much Afflicted With Conscience"*. (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2019), 8, 9, 56, 131, 142.

[13] J. Kruger, *Wieg. Die Verhaal van Maria du Plessis, neé Marie Buisset (1679–1751), Hugenoot en Vroedvrou.* (Somerset-Wes: Litera Publikasies, 2022).

changing phenomena which surround time and place[14] hence the need for a new kind of research with new directions and research objectives. But calls for newness do not imply having to start from scratch again. At the centre of context are humans in the web of life.[15] Andrew Hide quotes Barry Reay that society and culture cannot be understood without an examination of the relevant local contexts.[16] This fits well into the primary characteristic of microhistory with its ideal of being an intensive study of well-defined study objects. As a result, this makes context the beholder of both meaning and understanding.

Hai Ashkenazi (et al.) constructed a microhistory of a person after they studied 'a large number of grave goods made of perishable materials […] to recover aspects of the life of an individual person'.[17] Every human decision or act of inclusion (or historical selection) implies the exclusion of 'others': people, sources, interpretations, examples and more. Elisabeth Salter's view that when micro- and macro-historical investigations present a corrective to general history, then there is the potential for friction.[18] These place ethical burdens at the centre of history writing, more so when the study object is about ethics or for that matter, human emotions.

For Marnie Hughes-Warrington ethics is the individual's responsibility.[19] The relationship between microhistorians, their sources and narratives, implies a 'social contract

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[14] A. Blosser, 'Putting it in Context: Purpose, Progress, and Importance of Historic Contexts', Local Government Workshop, (Benicia: Office of Historic Preservation, 8 Mar. 2018), 2, https://op.parks.ca.gov/pages/1054/files/HistoricContext.pdf, accessed 17 Jun. 2023.

[15] J.W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life. Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital.* (London and New York: Verso, 2015), 8–17.

[16] A. Hinde, Book review of: Barry Reay, *Microhistories: Demography, Society and Culture in Rural England, 1800–1930.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), *Reviews in History*, 32 (1 Apr. 1977), n.p., https://reviews.history.ac.uk, accessed 5 July 2023.

[17] H. Ashkenazi, D. Langgut, S. Lev-Yadun, E. Weiss, G.K. Bar-Gal and Y. Goren, 'Microhistory in Archaeology and Its Contribution to the Archaeological Research: The Burial from "The Cave of the Warrior" as a Test Case', *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology and Heritage Studies,* 9, 4 (21 Nov. 2021), 376–94, https://doi.org/10.5325/jeasmedarcherstu.9.4.0376, accessed 11 Sep. 2022.

[18] E. Salter, 'Combining Microhistorical and Field Theory Approaches. Lay Popular Religious Practice in England during the Long Fifteenth Century', *Church History and Religious Culture*, 9, (2019), 440.

[19] J-M. Kuukkanen, 'Contribution' in M. Hughes-Warrington (with A. Martin), *Big and Little Histories. Sizing up Ethics in Historiography.* (New York: Routledge, 2022), ii.

ethics'[20] – one that cannot render microhistorical narratives as 'ethically neutral'.[21] Ethical responsibility stretches as far has having regard for the necessity to make changes to the research method and process. Because historians have always selected[22] and as they continue to do so, the historical images in their work differ from those of the novelist only that those created by the historian must pass the test of being 'a true one'.[23] This is not a necessary condition for novelists because they can write what they want. Szijártó's view of the subtle but important difference between history and literature[24] remains a key consideration. And this does not undo the fact that since historians are what they read and write, make literature and history indispensable for both.[25] What we read and write make us context bound, and thus it inadvertently imports the world of the emic (understanding culture from an insider's perspective) into the research process. Not only is context imported, it is also necessary on the input-side of the web of life. Once it becomes necessary, it becomes relative for desired research outcomes.

This self-evident truism is not without debate among scholars pro or contra microhistory. Microhistorians as agents have designed particular microhistorical methods and theories to suit their purposes as any field of specialisation requires and do. But not having to pass a 'truth' test is not merely having to find any alternatives. It becomes an inescapable position for historians. As archaeologists do, microhistorians can only discover what is realistic and work with what they have. This is a universal law of humankind's part-limitations.

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[20] Hughes-Warrington, *Big and Little Histories*, 104–6.
[21] Ibid., 114.
[22] A. Schaff, *History and Truth.* (Oxford, New York, Toronto, Sydney, Paris and Frankfurt: Pergamon Press, 1976), 205.
[23] Ibid., 88.
[24] I.M. Szijártó, 'Co-authoring History: Montpellier, the Vendée and the Co-authorship of the Sources', *Humanities*, (Open access), 2 (2013), 449–61, Doi: 10.3390/h2040449. ISSN 2076-0787, www.mdpi.com/journal/humanities, accessed 12 Dec. 2022.
[25] J. Cussen, 'We are What we Read and Write'. "The Story of America: Essays and Origins", Review of: J. Lepore, *The Story of America.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), *Erie Times-News* (17 Mar. 2013), n.p., https://www.academia.edu/22902854/review_of_Jill_Lepores_The_Story_of_America, accessed 24 May 2023.

For some historians the mid-20th century was a 'period of a watershed of historical writing before and after the 2nd world war.'[26] Swarnim Hingmang added that an

> [i]mportant landmark for the development of new social history Russian aggression on Eastern Europe, freedom struggle of the Third world countries and their Rebirth in the contemporary world, Imperialist activities of America in Vietnam and Cuba, the student's movement in France and Europe, the revolt against apartheid in African countries shook the mind of the intellectual people throughout the world.[27]

From Danilo Martucceli's perspective, studies about modernity that focus on rationalization, quantification, industrialization, standardization, commodification, and massification, made certain predictions about the decline of singularity, including the qualitative and heterogeneity, all which did not materialise.[28] The conceptual relatedness is formulated as follows:

> While sharing some methodological affinities with cultural anthropology, microhistory rejects both the grand narratives of macro historical paradigms and the relativism of postmodernist historiography, positioning itself as an alternative historiographical practice that seeks to restore agency to the historically marginalised while maintaining methodological rigour.[29]

About the influence of post-modernism on microhistory, J-M. Kuukkanen, argues that the resultant 'narrativist turn of the 1970s and 1980s transformed the discussion of general history'.[30] This is a big statement together with Magnússon conclusion of 2017 that general history was ill-prepared for these changes.[31] Microhistory emerged from intense dissatisfaction with social and cultural histories' inability to provide suitable answers.[32] From this

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[26] S. Hingmang, 'The Development of the Concept of New Social History: An Overview', *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research* ISSN 2348-3164 (online), Vol. 9, Issue 4, 82, October–December 2021, www.researchpublish.com, accessed 23 Dec. 2025.
[27] Ibid., 84.
[28] D. Martuccelli, 'Singularization', in P. Rebughini and E. Colombo, eds., *Framing Social Theory, Reassembling the Lexicon of Contemporary Social Sciences*. (London: Routledge, 2022), 108, DOI: 10.4324/9781003203308-8, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/362905757_Singularization, accessed 22 Dec. 2025.
[29] A.Y. Rather, 'Rethinking Local Oral and Microhistories', *Historical Research Journal of History and Archaeology*, Vol. 02, No. 04 (Oct-Dec. 2024), accessed 29 Dec. 2025.
[30] J-M. Kuukkanen, 'The Missing Narrativist Turn in the Historiography of Science', *History and Theory*, 51 (Oct. 2012), 340, https://www.academia.edu/12240154/The_Missing_Narrativist_Turn_in_Historiography_of_Science, accessed 20 Mar. 2022.
[31] S.G. Magnússon, 'A «New Wave» of Microhistory? OR; It's the Same Old Story – A Fight for Love and Glory', *Quaderna storici*, 155 / A. LII, N. 2 (agosto 2017), 558.
[32] O. Paz, *Who Killed Panayot? Reforming Ottoman Legal Culture in the 19th Century*. (London

disillusionment stems the anticipation that microhistory continues to be subjected to diverse and contradictory interpretations, approaches, evaluations and re-evaluations. While some critics argue that microhistory is still looking for its identity, the majority of microhistorians are well aware of this challenging dilemma, as well as the difficulty for contra microhistorians to sustain the pendulum of critiques.[33]

There are still unresolved questions in microhistory that date back to its founding years. The microhistorical method is regularly pushed towards a new *finis*,[34] resulting in more paradoxical situations which the intellectual community of microhistorians have to face. This is fertile intellectual soil for microhistorians to stand on, as shown by Ginzburg in his discussion about the relationship between civilization and barbarism. Since all customs are equal, the study of small-scale experiments in relation to general issues, such as the variety of human customs, is paradoxical.[35] But methodology-talk is not enough. Three examples illustrate the application of the microhistorical method in diverse fields of study. This entire study shows productive comments about the successes of microhistory. To merely find what you are looking for, is not enough.[36]

Eduardo Ascensão's study about post-colonial informal and internal settlements on the periphery of Lisbon since the 1970s, 'proposes a cyborg reading'.[37] By using microhistory,

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and New York: Routledge, The Taylor Francis Group, 2021), 7.

[33] C. Engelbrecht, 'Microhistory: Its Critiques', Internet Archive.org, (June 2021), 1, https://archive.org/details/microhistory-its-critiques-1, accessed 15 Jan. 2026.

[34] I borrow the term *finis* from I.M. Szijártó, 'Probing the Limits of Microhistory', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 47, 1 (Jan. 2017), 193, https://doi.org/10.1215/10829636-3716638, accessed 18 Oct. 2018.

[35] C. Ginzburg, 'Civilization and Barbarism', *Sign Systems Studies* 45 (3/4, 2017), 249-262 DOI:10.12697/SSS.2017.45.3-4.03, LicenseCC BY-NC-N 'SS.2017.45.3-4.03. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322218866_Civilization_and_barbarism, accessed 20 Dec. 2022.

[36] M. Raposcher, 'Horizon: Philosophy, Religions, Customs, Society', *Corriere della Sera, 'La Lettura'*. (Interview with Carlo Ginzburg, translated by T. Cohen. (18 Oct. 2020), https://www.academia.edu/44818915/Interview_with_Carlo_Ginzburg_La_Lettura_10_2020_translated_by_Tom_Cohen, accessed 12 July 2022.

[37] E. Ascensão, 'The Slum Multiple: A Cyborg Microhistory of an Informal Settlement in Lisbon', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, DOI:10.1111/1468-2427.12301 (2016), 948. I want to thank dr. E. Ascensão for having made this publication

Ascensão wrote that he was able to 'give voice to a community who had been invisible to the state and to record the specific condition of the production of urban space in Quinta d Serra [a holiday village outside Lisbon] from the late 1970s to the present'.[38] This specific microhistorical method can benefit similar studies.

Hughes-Warrington[39] recently reminded readers that '[n]o two histories are the same' and yet, '[m]ost of our views are shaped by communal groupthink rather than by individual rationality […] [e]ven scientists are not immune to the power of groupthink….'[40] Thomas S. Kuhn[41] emphasised this point seven decades ago when he expressed surprise about the scope of open disagreements between social scientists regarding the nature of legitimate scientific problems and methods. Simon considers microhistory as a normal science (in the Kuhnean tradition) but believed that after microhistory's initial historiographical success, there would be no further successes because its practitioners 'transformed microhistory into methodology'.[42] This view can be taken on review on the basis of the vast microhistorical methodological pluralism of approaches. Regardless of Simons' position, the literature teems with examples of microhistorians' successes, including empirical outcomes.

Hans Renders and David Veltman summarised this by saying that a lot has been written about microhistory, but that convincing conclusions about its significance are still outstanding.[43] In summary, the range of divers opinions vary from those who recognise the

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available to me.

[38] Ibid., 953.

[39] Hughes-Warrington, *Big and Little Histories*, 1.

[40] A. Smith, *First People. The Last History of the KHOISAN.* (Cape Town, Johannesburg and London: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2022), 3.

[41] T.S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.* Second edition, enlarged. *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*, 2, 2. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), viii.

[42] Z.B. Simon, 'Method and Perspective', 2. (Emphasis added.), *Journal of Microhistory* (2009), 1–23, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/5643196431, accessed 1 June 2022.

[43] H. Renders and D. Veltman, 'Dossier on Microhistory', in H. Renders and D. Veltman, eds., *Fear of Theory. Towards a New Justification of Biography*. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021), 198.

decided impact on general history to reports of 'fundamentally undecidedness'.[44] Three examples support this point.

First, in his study about a failed opium deal (in October 1850 near Iamir in the Province of Aydin, Türkiye), Omri Paz concluded that 'the question who killed gardener Panayot remains unanswered'.[45] And Claire J. de Larivière[46] gave no definitive answer about the snowball events in her book about disgruntled locals who pelted their outgoing ruler with snowballs on 27 January 1511. Lastly, Rob Turrell reached a similar position in 2002 about the crucial question about motive for a murder he studied and admitted that it is impossible and difficult to know or that sometimes, one just do not know.[47] It appears then that microhistorical outcomes are increasingly having undecided conclusions. Sometimes authors write that they leave it to their readers to decide. Undecided outcomes, according to Geertz, can be interpreted as 'privacy theories'[48] but undecidedness is not in contrast to ethical requirements of science. Figuratively speaking, there is some kind of long-running insurance policy against historical despair. Going back to it and having to look at the fine print, might just be the right step before going forward again. The historian's 'duel task of discovering the new significant facts and turning them into facts of history'[49] is not new:

> No document can tell us more than what the author of the document thought – what he thought had happened, what he thought out to happen or would happen, or perhaps only what he wanted others to think he thought, or even only what he himself thought he thought. None of this means anything until the historian has got to work on it and deciphered it. The facts, whether found in documents or not, have still to be processed by the historian before he can make use of them….[50]

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[44] H. Renders and D. Veltman, 'The Representativeness of a Reputation: A "Third Wave" in Microhistory', in H. Renders and D. Veltman, eds., *Fear of Theory. Towards a New Justification of Biography.* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021), 194.
[45] Paz, *Who Killed Panayot?* 225.
[46] C.J. de Larivière, *The Revolt of Snowballs: Murano Confronts Venice*, 1511. Translated by T.V. Cohen. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 144–7.
[47] R. Turrell, 'The "Singular Case" of Mietje Bontnaal, the Bushmanland Murderess', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29, 1 (Mar. 2002), 101–3.
[48] C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays*.(New York: Basic Books Publishers, 1973).
[49] E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (Harmondsworth: 1974), 15–6.
[50] Ibid., 16.

The above is relevant for historical context and geographical space. There is a need to explain the regional, local and rural history 'turn(s)' that South African history writing took at about the same time when *microstoria* emerged in Italy during the mid-1970s. A good example is Elize S. van Eeden's historiographical and methodological reflections about regional, local, urban and rural history in South Africa. The value is in probing similarities between aspects of regional and local history when compared to microhistory, but definitions and focus were still limited to the region as a unit of analysis.[51] These relationships are probably best illustrated in the context of enviro-microhistory. Human-induced climate change as a global phenomenon impacts mainly on and is largely experienced at the local scale. It requires generalisations typical of rainfall predictions, but need rather be avoided to focus resources on the individual or community-level human micro-experiences because that is where most socio-economic havoc and loss to life is endured.[52]

Finally, historical approaches differ to the extent that the methodological procedures designed to aid in the reconstruction of both everyday modes of lives are part of individual, local contexts of neighbourhoods, villages and the city.[53] Little precludes the re-evaluation of testimonies also from another perspective: this entire study is about competing perspectives and debates. Natalie Z. Davis's position is 'that things don't have to be the way they are now'[54]

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[51] E.S. van Eeden, 'Regional, Local, Urban and Rural History as Nearby Spaces and Places: Historiographical and Methodological Reflections', *New Contree*, 63 (Jan. 2012), 13, https://www.academia.edu/54032649/Regional_local_urban_and_rural_history_as_nearby_spaces_and_places_historiographical_and_methodological_reflections, accessed 13 July 2023.

[52] C. Engelbrecht, 'Environmental Microhistory: The Value of MPV Franco's "An Appraisal of Environmental History: Epistemological and Historiographical Insights'', in *Fronteiras: Journal of Social, Technological and Environmental Science*, Vol.7, No.3, 2018, pp.262–274. https://archive.org/details/environmental-micro-history-the-value-of-mpv-franco-s-1/mode/, accessed 3 Jan. 2026.

[53] A. Lüdtke, ed., *The History of Everyday Life. Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life.* Translated by W. Templar. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 9, 14.

[54] P. Novick, *That Noble Dream. The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession.* 26th printing. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 462.

and, as she later noted: 'there was something in the air'.[55] Form these stem the view that 'change' is probably the only constant in the business of microhistory.

Some concluding remarks about matters of fact, theory and method, bring this introductory overview to a close. W-questions go a long way to ensure logical research sequence and consequence. They assist to guard against scholarly oversimplification[56] because they have theoretical, epistemological and practical implications. They are theoretical because different theoretical stances are usually proposed by scholars who support and defend microhistory. Contra views fuel discourse about current and even future theoretical and related practical foundations of microhistory. They are epistemological in the sense of semantic differences between the contestants, and they are practical in the implications of method and eventual conclusions drawn. And Max Horkheir once warned: 'Woe to the man who tells the truth in simple terms.'[57]

There are also diversity and progress (as two sides to the same coin) in microhistory theory that stem from the diverse internal and external views about microhistory. Both Magnússon and Szijártó raised fundamental questions of theory, epistemology and practice about microhistory for microhistorians.[58]

Finally, theory and practice in combination with microhistory, set the *finis* for microhistory. The conclusion to ignore thick descriptions, is introduce flaws that distort

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[55] J. Roitman and K. Fatah-Black, '"Being Speculative is Better than not to do it at all:" An Interview with Natalie Zemon Davis', *Itinerario*, 39, 01 (Apr. 2015), 3, DOI: 1017/S0165115315000108. https://www.academia.edu/14031917/_Being_speculative_is_better_than_to_not_do_it_at_all_an_interview_with_Natalie_Zemon_Davis, accessed 30 Nov. 2022.

[56] W.G. Gray, 'On Disruption: Jill Lepore's Timely Rebuttal of Clay Christensen.' H-Diplo essay, 120 (28 Nov. 2014), 9, http://tiny.cc/E120 or http://h-diplo.org/essays/PDF/E120.pdf, https://www.academia.edu/23053075/On_Disruption_Jill_Lepores_Timely_Rebuttal_of_Clay_Christensen, accessed 24 May 2023.

[57] M. Horkheimer, *Dawn and Decline. Notes 1926–1931 and 1950–1969*. Translated by M. Shaw with an afterword by E. Gebhardt. (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978), 17.

[58] S.G. Magnússon, and I.M. Szijártó, *What is Microhistory? Theory and Practice.* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

understanding.[59] Thick description means a unique relationship with the sources, particularly useful for microhistory.

In essence, humankind sees, hears, smells, tastes or feels 'something(s)' in or from, their natural environment and some decide to write about it, either immediately or at a later stage. Crime scene investigators do so immediately at their first site visit and take notes and photos, because they know through experience that the longer they wait, the more diverse the stories become about the incident. Paradoxically, the longer the elapse between cause and effect, the blurrier the situation becomes and then only with huge effort can this diminished situation be reversed. Historians in general and microhistorians in particular, push back against this ever-diminishing *past* present in order to reconstruct a *new future past* which we can then read as the seemingly newest version of understanding and recorded history. Their latest understanding is paradoxically, not necessarily the best understanding, as the re-opening of forensic cold cases often reflect.

2. Microhistorical advances, paradox and historiographical diversity

Three decades ago, J.D. Ellis made important observations about microhistory in her MA thesis that are relevant for this discussion: the acknowledgement of the merits of controversy, debates and historiographical contexts which microhistory's method brings to historical inquiry; her defence of microhistory as a new genre; the unique characteristic of how quickly microhistory established a popular[60] readership, and lastly, that she wanted to foreground the innovative, the

[59] P. Novick, 'My Correct Views on Everything', (AHR) Forum. *The American Historical Review*, 96, 3 (June 1991), 699, http://www.xroads.virginia.edu/~DRBR2/novick5.pdf, accessed 27 Oct. 2022.

[60] Addendum: *Google Books, NGram Viewer*: Microhistory, (Smoothing of 3), 1950–2022. https://www.google.com/search?q=Google+Books+NgramViewer%2C+microhistory&sca,

close look at small objects, the diversity of topics, an interest in ignored events and relationships, and the unique or a-typical.[61]

The point that Ellis made was that social scientists should not only safeguard the features of their own society, but as D.J. Goldhagen wrote, rather choose a sensible starting point and then work forward to uncover what actually happened.[62]

This is in line with the going-back-to-go-forward principle which Gwinn and Simon debated.[63] The theoretical and methodological implications reflect unity of approach, but is, paradoxically, linked to the thematic in and discursive diversity of, microhistory. The growing volume of history-related publications, the wide range of diverse fields of study, and the diverse debates *within* and *about* microhistory, complicate generalisations about going back to go forward.

There is a notable caveat as Ginzburg warned about hanging 'on to the gold old things. Looking at the past in that way does not make sense'[64] because same thinking tends to yield same results. The same can be postulated about language. Together, they bring this discussion to an important characteristic of microhistory: the characteristic of the intensive-reduced-study of marginal people, marginal societies or groups, and marginal sources.

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accessed 5 Jan. 2026.

[61] J.D. Ellis, 'Microhistory: "The Scent of Human Flesch"' (MA thesis, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, 1996), 1–2, 5, https://ttu-ir.tdl.org/bitstream/handle/2346/19067/31295009870329.pdf;sequence=1, accessed 23 June 2002.

[62] D.J. Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners. Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust.* (New York: Vintage Books. A Division of Random House, 1997), 30.

[63] I. Gwinn, 'Going Back to go Forward. A Reply to Hans Medick', *Historische Anthropologie*. KULTUR, GESCHELLSCHAFT, ALLTAG. Thema: Konflikt 24, 3 (2016), 418–31, https://www.academia.edu/33502308/Going_Back_to_Go_Forward_A_Reply_to_Hans_Medick_Historische_Anthropologie_24_3_2016, accessed 27 June 2022; Simon, 'Method and Perspective', 3.

[64] B. Bärtås, A. Slávik and M. Teran, 'Twelve Snapshots From a Conversation with Carlo Ginzburg' (Oct. 2014), 211, http://zbzj.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Ginzburg-med-B%C3%A4rt%C3%A5s-Sl%C3%A1vik-Teran-2016-%E2%80%93-Dynamism-in-a-single-image-intervju.pdf, accessed 15 May 2022.

Ginzburg was aware that many historians tended to dismiss and ignore researching the marginal in society. A few years later he again discussed the subject of a 'patronizing attitude'[65] of historians and warned that attitudes towards 'methodological uncertainty' can be dangerous just because sources are considered 'useless' or because of assumptions that sources are not 'objective'.[66] Ginzburg argued that even skimpy, scattered and obscure documentation are useful.[67] This burden on historians increases when the process of perception together with the sources provide distorted pictures.[68] Ginzburg acknowledged the shortcomings of this research dilemma and later argued that sensible historians will not dismiss this evidence as inherently unacceptable.[69] In the same spirit, Davis explained three decades later that she 'used texts of all kinds to get at the history […] anything relevant […] every scrap of evidence […] from both inside and outside the bounds of literature'.[70] This is central to microhistory: that of all kinds of sources have the ability to fill in the previously glossed over areas in history.

There is a complex paradox at play here: What, of what is given to be seen, was actually seen[71] when it comes to bringing the past up to date? Whether environmental microhistory or Science and Technology Studies,[72] or the microhistory of a tenement building (1882–1932) in

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[65] C. Ginzburg, 'On Dichotomies. Comment on Sahlins, Marshall. The Original Political Society', *Hau. Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 7, 2 (2017), 91–128, DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.14318/hau7.2.017, (2017), 139–42, https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdf/10.14318/hau7.2.017, accessed 18 Sep. 2022.

[66] C. Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms. The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*. With a new preface and translated by John and Anne Tedeschi. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), xxv, xxiv.

[67] Ibid., xxv.

[68] Ibid.

[69] C. Ginzburg, 'Just One Witness. The Extermination of the Jews and the Principle of Reality', in C. Ginzburg, *Threads and Traces. True False Fictive.* Translated by Anne C. Tedeschi and John Tedeschi. (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2012), 168.

[70] N.Z. Davis, 'The Historian and Literary Uses', *Profession* (2003), 21–3, https://www.academia.edu/37223240/Natalie_Zemon_Davis_The_Historian_and_Literary_Uses_Profession_2003_21_27, accessed 5 Dec. 2022.

[71] N. Ragaru, '"Dialogues with the Visible: The Historian and the Gaze"', *Critique Internationale*, 68 (2015), 1, https://www.academia.edu/16428935/_Dialogues_avec_le_visible_l_historien_et_le_internationale_68_2015_p_9_16, accessed 21 Sep.2023.

[72] S.B. Pritchard, 'Joining Environmental History with Science and Technology Studies. Promises, Challenges and Contributions', in D. Jørgensen, F.A. Jørgensen and S.B. Pritchard, eds., *New Natures: Joining Environmental History with Science and*

Paris,[73] microhistory boasts boundless study objects. Even a failed drug deal in the nineteenth century[74] (in the Aydin Province of Turkey), a failed assassination attempt of tsar Alexander II in April 1866,[75] the invisibilisation of flower sellers in Cape Town's history of identity,[76] the role of the individual in a society where class was central during Stalin's era,[77] disgruntled locals who threw snowballs at their outgoing ruler outside Venice in January 1511,[78] a physical object such as a town called Buczacz,[79] they were all productive fields for successful microhistorical investigations. The list is endless.

With the advent of growing interest in the close positioning of microhistory relative to global microhistory,[80] the debates about microhistory's methods and approaches changed again and represents another characteristic of microhistory: microhistory's relative micro-macro link

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Technology Studies. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), 1–17, https://www.academia.edu/84790742/Joining_Environmental_History_with_Science_and_Technology_Studies, accessed 10 Sep. 2022.

[73] Langrognet, 'A Microhistory of Migrants'.

[74] Paz, *Who Killed Panayot?*

[75] C. Verhoeven, *The Odd Man Karakozov. Imperial Russia, Modernity and the Birth of Terrorism.* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011).

[76] L. Rabe, 'Living History – The Story of Adderley Street's Flower Sellers', South African *Journal of Cultural History*, 24, 1 (2010), 83–104, https://www.ajol.info/index.php/sajch/article/view/64679, accessed 20 May 2017.

[77] O. Figes, *The Whisperers. Private Life in Stalin's Russia*. (London: Penguin Books, 2008), xxvii–xxviii). See also: Z. Tóth, 'A Portrait of a Young Man as a Survivor: Mihály Cserei (1690–1697). A Case Study in Historical Anthropology' (MA thesis, Central European University, Budapest, 2007), https://www.academia.edu/2549261/A_PORTRAIT_OF_A_YOUNG_MAN ASA SURVIVOR_MIH%C3%81LY_CSEREI_1690_1697_A_CASE_STUDY_IN_HISTORICAL_ANTHROPOLOG, accessed 15 June 2022.

[78] De Larivière, *The Revolt of Snowballs*.

[79] T. Frydel, 'The Ongoing Challenge of Reproducing an Integrated Microhistory of the Holocaust in East Central Europe', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 20, 4 (2018), DOI: 10.1080/14623528.2018.1527091, 624, https: //doi.org/10/1080/14623528.2018.1527091. Book review of: Omer Bartov, Anatomy of a Genocide: The Life and Death of a Town Called Buczacz (2018), 624, https://www.academia.edu/39940836/The_Ongoing_Challenge_of_Producing_an_Integrated_Microhistory_of_the_Holocaust_in_East_Central_Europe_review_of_Omer_Bartov_Anatomy_of_a_Genocide_The_Life_and_Death_of_a_Town_Called_Buczacz_2018, accessed 11 Sep. 2022; C. West, 'Visions of a Nineteenth-century Village: An Early Medieval Microhistory', *Workshop Journal*, 81 (2016), 1–16, https://academic.oup.com/hwj/article/81/1/1/2385576, accessed 29 May 2022.

[80] H. Medick, 'Turning Global? Microhistory in Extension', Historische Anthropologie, 24, 2 (2016), 241-2. https://www.academia.edu/30232769/D_e_b_a_t_t_e_Turning_Global_Microhistory_in_Extension_1_in_Historische_Anthropologie_24_2_2016_S_241_25, accessed 27 June 2022.

to global history. For Medick, global microhistorians should focus on what they assumed what happened in and in-between spaces of historical transformations and changes.[81] Assumptions of what actually happened reveal new debates, some without definitive answers about the relationship between microhistory and global history. Microhistory does not only study individuals but also forgotten events, places and ideas about how it strives to frame and answer 'Big Historical Questions.

Gwinn's response contemplates the paradoxical endeavour of global microhistory as implied in the 'simultaneous enlarging and contracting of the optic of historical understanding'.[82] The implication is that microhistory's reduction of scale to local and particular levels, simultaneously enhances a magnified perspective to the study of social relations. Gwinn and Medick agrees about the complementary relationship between microhistorical analysis and the agenda of global history.[83] This new reproachment between micro- and global history, is microhistory's so-called 'global turn'. A few historiographical examples are relevant.

During an interview in November 2007, Carlo Ginzburg's answer to a question whether there is 'any contradiction […] between "micro-history" and "world-history"' was:

> No, there isn't. I consider microhistory as an intrinsically comparative approach (although the comparison may be also implicit) whose ultimate goal is to open up the possibility for better generalisations. For the same reason, world-history cannot ignore microhistory.[84]

This view dates back to the mid-1970s. In line with this thinking, Francesca Trivellato pointed out that Ginzburg wrote about microhistory and global history before global history existed,

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[81] Ibid., 251.
[82] Gwinn, 'Going Back to go Forward', 418.
[83] Ibid., 419.
[84] S. Subrahmanyam, 'The Stuff of Which History is Made: A Brief Conversation with Carlo Ginzburg', *The Hindu* (21 Nov. 2007), 7, https://www.academia.edu/46044905/The_Stuff_of_Which_History_is_Made_A_Brief_Conversation_with_Carlo_Ginzburg, accessed 9 July 2022.

before microhistory was part of the historiographical vocabulary.[85] Szijártó's view is also clear: microhistory can be a valuable junior partner in cooperating with macrohistory.[86] The complementary relation to global history is a further microhistorical characteristic. Giovanni Levi does not distinguish between microhistory and global history because they ask different questions and suggest different perspectives.[87] The implication is that being different by nature, is not mutually exclusive in the everyday practise of microhistory.

These appear paradoxical. Different specialisms, already defined as detrimental by themselves, import a sense of historical uncertainty: Microhistory with its own methods and theories; macrohistory with its own methods and theories, and a complementary position between these two, seems a difficult path for microhistory to follow. The impression is that when one conflates too much between social history and cultural history, or between the micro and the macro, then one might be put into place with ease. The only point of generality between these positionings, are their intensions to correct history where it is needed. To bring to life again, to include, or to give the rightful place in historical research to those who were left behind or out, forgotten, ignored, not excluding those who were purposefully silenced or written out of their histories, is to make visible again.

The life-story of Elias of Babylon,[88] presented such opportunity for John-Paul A. Ghobrial. The next few paragraphs focus on Ghobrial's areas of interest that underly his reconstruction of Elias's life-history.

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[85] C. Ginzburg, 'Microhistory and Global History', (in conversation with Francesca Trivellato), 2 Mar. 2021. 23rd Annual Joseph and Rebecca Meyerhoff Lecture in Judaic Studies. Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies. University of Princeton, Princeton. Uploaded on 3 Mar. 2021, n.p., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgHcSCXnnM&t=3089s, accessed 18 Sep. 2022.

[86] I.M. Szijártó, 'The Paths of Microhistory', *Quaderna storici* 159 / a. LIII, n. 3 (dicembre 2018), 917–27, DOI: 10. 1408/94603, https//www.rivisteweb.it/doi. 10.1408/94603, accessed 5 June 2020.

[87] G. Levi, 'Microhistory and Global History'*, Critical History*, 69 (Dec. 2017), 19.

[88] J-P. Ghobrial, 'The Secret Life of Elias of Babylon and the Uses of Global Microhistory', *Past and Present*, 222, February 2014, 51–93, https://archive.org/details/secretlifeofelia0000john/page/56/mode/1up, accessed 25 Dec. 2025.

Elias left Babylon in 1668 apparently with no intension to return.[89] Ghobrial's interest is 'in a wider question about how historians should use a life such as that of Elias of Babylon'[90] and explained this in the following manner:

> [y]et for all the ink spent reprinting the *Book of Travels* in recent years, there has been almost no simultaneous effort to explore either his motivations for writing or, indeed, the wider context in which his work was produced. No attempts have been made to answer even the most basic questions about his actual identity. In search of answers to such questions, I have been piecing together the clues he left behind. Here, I present an early account of my findings on the trail of Elias in preparation for a wider study of his life and his writings. What follows, then, is necessarily an incomplete tale, in part because of the disparate nature of the sources. Because Elias lived at the nexus of several documentary traditions, we can only capture glimpses of him as if in a hall of mirrors where each new source distorts, skews and stretches certain elements of his person in unforeseen ways.[91]

At the time of Ghobrial's writing there were much scholarly work about global history through the movements or dispersal of material objects, information and people.[92] Imbedded herein are the clues for Ghobrial's approach that Elias's life appears to resonate well with scholarly calls for global history research and that his timing fits well with the interest of wider scholarly debates.

What is different, are the approaches of other scholars who have paid special attention to the 'human element of connectedness'.[93] Ghobrial identified two approaches amongst this group. One approach is from those scholars who focus their research on 'particular groups or communities.'[94] This approach follows extensive and meticulous archival research and explored ways which and how specific groups carve out spaces for themselves in close proximity or other spaces. The result gave rise to a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the connectedness of the study period.[95]

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[89] Ibid., 51.
[90] Ibid., 56.
[91] Ibid., 55.
[92] Ibid., 56.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid., 57.

The other approach is 'in the form of a growing cast of characters whose global lives have been used by scholars to construct general accounts of the *nature of connectedness* in the early modern world.'[96] This approach blurs the boundaries between biography, microhistory and global history. Although these scholars vary in their research approach and work across an array of study fields, the binding factor between them is 'the idea that the lives of individuals might be used as keyholes through which to view the worlds in which they lived.' Tonio Andrade promotes history-writing of the interconnected world one-story-at-a-time as symptomatic of what microhistorians do, but some historians disagree agree with the idea of global microhistory.

While Andrade calls for a proliferation of 'stories of individual lives in global contexts,'[97] Francesca Trivellato believes global historians have not yet explored the full potentiality of microcity, and that they are detached from the ideological and theoretical impulses and also that the original ideals of *microstoria* e.g. Grendi and Ginzburg were idiosyncratic and that oversimplifications of generalities, reveal broader trends.[98]

When considering the earlier reference about material goods, Ghobrial's position is that the movement of people does not offer an equally unproblematic way of recovering the connected world that global historians, including himself, seek. This is necessary because:

> People are not plates, inanimate bits of porcelain in motion from one part of the world to another. And so, when dealing with the mobility of individuals, we must adopt a more refined approach that more effectively incorporates what we have learned in recent years from scholars working on questions of subjectivity and the history of everyday life.[99]

What is needed is a more sophisticated approach[100] because underneath the images of a global world, is a secret life that has less to do with global connections of the world in which Elias

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[96] Ibid., 57.
[97] Ibid., 58.
[98] Ibid, 57.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid., 58.

lived, but that it rather reflects local phenomenon.[101] This emphasises the argument that Elias's local memory matter as do the 'confluence of genres'.[102] And in a roundabout way, this brings the discussion back to the concept of invisibilisation in microhistory, to make those who were left behind visible again.

The argument is that to make visible again is to guard against invisibilising again and for that close attention to a well-defined intensive microhistorical study is to keep an eye on the dangers of going back into silos-science.

3. Invisibilisation

Historians are, among other methodological and theoretical considerations, in the business of making what is not possible to be seen, to become visible. This section takes notice of the gains from the previous pages in order to construct 'arguments possible from an epistemological'[103] frame that calls for the prospect of a relation between paradox and the processes of invisibilisation.

The traditional and (still) the most popular use of the concept invisibilisation, refers to the political suppression, ousting or eradicating of individuals and their institutions. Or their access to means of opposition or resting the regime, its policies and agents, and to be silenced. It is necessary to keep language and the influence of the sociology of silencing in mind. Telling or gesticulating, or pointing at someone or a group, to be quiet, shush, hush, stonewall, delay, obstruct or through evasive behaviour, systematically invisibilise the victims of targeted groups.

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[101] Ibid., 59.
[102] Ibid.
[103] E.G. Leandra, and C.L.B. Passos, 'The Evidentiary Paradigm for Analysis of Narratives, Self-comprehension and World Understanding', *Educan em Revista*, *Curiba*, DOI: http//dx.doi.org/10.1590/0104. 4060.74611, 37, 5, e74611, 2021, accessed 24 Dec. 2025.

Alina Dragolea recently explained how 'invisible' Hungarian women perpetrators who were disregarded in the history of violent women perpetrators of war crimes and atrocities, were in fact real during the Second World War. Invisibilisation in this example is a strategy of an oppressive process that interferes with truthful versions about how the political far-right came to power during the previous century. Oppressive processes render some parts of human behaviour of targeted people invisible and defies understanding about how the past reverberates into the present.[104] Instead of writing openly about the appeal of far-right ideology to Hungarian women (and elsewhere) who participated as active party agents in party activities 'including violent ones, [these] active women did not fit being a woman *and* [as] an active political agent in the [Arrow Cross Party] party that expects a woman to be a mother above all'.[105] This suggests that microhistorical literature successfully exposed the close relationship between paradox and invisibilisation. The aims of invisibilising had the opposite effect: it drove the women to resisting the authorities.

A close study of invisibilisation reflects unresolved binaries. Invisibilisation did not previously exist under this word, but indeed during the early years of critical theory of the Frankfurt School in the 1920s, will explain this.

In the mid-1920s Max Horkheimer wrote that '[m]en relate to each other, talk to each other, deal with each other, persecute each other, yet they do not see each other. [They even have] 'ideas about each other […] that […] developed into a full consciousness of man and the world.'[106] These false consciousnesses relate to nothing unless we recognise that the modern-day sociological phenomenon of invisibilisation is directly linked to understanding why social

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[104] A. Dragolea, Book review of: Andrea Pető, *The Women of the Arrow Cross Party: Invisible Hungarian Perpetrators in the Second World War.* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2020), eBook, doi: 101017/slr.22.12 (2022), 230–31, https://www.academia.edu/83868712/REVIEW_Alina_Dragolea_The_Women_of_the_Arrow_Cross_Party_in_Slavic_Review_2022_1, accessed 30 July 2022.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Horkheimer, *Dawn and Decline*, 17.

regression into new low levels of human darkness continue to occur despite remarkable technological achievements.[107]

Invisibilisation is defined in terms of different exclusions and marginalisations of individuals and permutations of social groups, and as a conscious and strategic process of understanding the silencing or making 'invisible'. It then opens up all kinds of networks of unnecessary sufferings and the un-, under- or non-representativity from more than just the public spheres of societal or individual private life. An extreme form of invisibilisation, is mass murders. Horkheimer argued that massacres were part of daily life.[108] Throughout the ages, mass burials were exactly that: to quickly get rid of the many victims.

Memory studies of all kinds, including microhistory, are usually closely linked to archaeology. Humankind's memories can be partially impeded but not wiped out. Technological advancements are today much faster than invisibilisation strategies can be successfully mastered. Mass media's false consciousness promotes social awarenesses of false theory or the perpetuation of untruths in historiography which is perceived as true. They prop up unjust orders that permanently or exclusively remain 'bad' societies. And despite humankind's achievements, we still live in darkness because language fails us as a 'choice of being a finite tool, or an illusion'.[109] It means that present forms of invisibilisation are not too different from Horkheimer's mid-1920s as indicated above. What is different, is today's faster process of uninvisibilising: once an instance of apparent invisibilisation is discovered, it hits the world of the social media instantaneously. The cloak-and-dagger characterisations of invisibilisation is nowadays paradoxically irrelevant. In a strange way invisibilising others, in

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[107] C. Engelbrecht, 'Horkheimer and the 'Historical Situation'', *Internet Archive.org*, (2016), 1, https://archive.org/details/horkheimer-and-the-historical-situation/mode/1up?q=darkness, accessed 31 Dec. 2025. See also: Horkheimer, M. and T.W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments*. Edited by Gunzelin Schmidt Noerr and translated by Edmund Jephcott. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002).

[108] Horkheimer, *Dawn and Decline*, 19.

[109] Ibid., 29–31.

practically full view of the public, is to become invisible. In a paradoxical manner the practice of invisibilising has an anachronistic enlightenment aura around it.

If Horkheimer was correct, then the microhistorical method is well positioned to make forms of silence, seen and heard – to become un-invisibilised. And yet, twentieth-century civilisation believed in what could not be seen.[110] Zane McNeill uses the terms 'ousting' and 'silencing' as methods to invisibilise political opponents[111] while Natalie Z. Davis is more specific:

> The violence of the religious riot is distinguished at least in principle from the action of political authorities, who can legally silence, humiliate, demolish punish, torture and execute; and also from the action of soldiers, who at certain times and places can legally kill and destroy.[112]

The process and objectives of uninvisibilising is to restore the voices of those who were invisibilised. Marginalised people, the unaccounted for, including their un-recorded lives, those who no-one misses, are the focus of microhistory as the intensive study of a well-defined research project through applying the microscopic approach and w-questions to frame and answer 'Big Historical Questions'. The common denominator is that they were poor, downtrodden, social marginals or worse, even described as poor rogues. To study similar peoples is important because being silent about silencing changes the picture of the pasts because it is an integrated, if not an orchestrated process of producing forgetting.[113] This leads to a next argument about paradox.

Past futures and *past* presents fade into *new* pasts, the detail of which deteriorate with every passing minute as new pasts accumulate in the present, waiting to be unearthed, studied

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[110] H.J. Spencer, 'Believing in the Invisible', (Feb. 2016), 1–6, https://www.academia.edu/29336659/BELIEVING_IN_THE_INVISIBLE_Review_of_How_Experiments_End_by_Peter_Galinson, accessed 9 Dec. 2022.

[111] N.Z. Davis, 'The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France', *Past and Present*, 59, 1 (May 1973), 52, https://www.academia.edu/37220648/Natalie_Zemon_Davis_The_Rites_of_Violence_Religious_Riot_in_Sixteenth_Century_France_Past_and_Present_59_1_May_1973_51_91, accessed 2 July 2023.

[112] A. Kateusz, *Mary and Early Christian Women. Hidden Leadership.* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 185, https://www.academia.edu/39169135/Mary_and_Early_Christian_Women_Hidden_Leadership, accessed 16 May 2023.

[113] Ibid.

and recorded. Human memory seems to outlast, over time, most invisibilisation projects because invisibilisors usually have only one opportunity to invisibilise their objects. Collective memory studies on the other hand have the advantage of time and technology on its side. Un-invisibilisors can go back day after day, year after year and century after century to their crime scenes as historic forensic sites of interest to find and report on their un-invisibilisation success, as new technologies become available. Because humans do not entirely forget histories of investigative-purposed invisibilisation, renewed efforts repeat itself. The themes and practices of displaying invisibilisation from one generation to the other, is foregrounded is one century at a time, if not sooner. This is familiar in forensic investigations when cold cases are eventually solved.

Dragolea's earlier views are of value because they redirect research focus to this new, debatable theme in microhistory and the development of methodological approaches necessary to study the phenomenon of invisibilisation in South Africa. One example is how the office of the Public Protector contributes to invisibilise political party agents in relation to alleged fraudulent, corruptive and related illegal activities in the eyes of civic society. Alleged invisibilisation deceptively reconstructs the pasts within the persistent illegal practices of state capture when due judicial processes are not upheld. There is of course a long history to this. The first colonial societies at the southernmost tip of Africa, started their roots under the 'provincialised' VOC and the ideas that came to the Cape of Good, 'were drawn from very particular intellectual and cultural traditions that could not claim any universal validity.[114] The VOC had an aura of connectedness into its everywhereness. Today, best described as modern-day investigative journalism, researchers report in detail, on the immoral lifestyle of governor W.A. van der Stel at the Cape: splendid, exorbitant household, sly schemes, corruption,

[114] D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference.* With a new preface by the author. (Princeton: Princeton University Press), xiii.

monopoly formation, and bartering with indigenous population[115] at the expense of the citizenry.

This study proposes that the microhistorical method is well-positioned to elevate invisibilisation to a useful analytical category when studying fraudulent, corrupt and illegal party agents' activities, disguised or shielded by state-sponsored institutional structures or post-truth rhetoric. Invisibilisation as an analytical category can be applied in much the same way as Riedwaan Mossage used the

> notion of missing-ness […] to work in underscoring notions of history and its relation to a category of missing persons in South Africa as they emerge and are figured through various discursive strategies constituted by and through apartheid's violence and iterations thereof.[116]

A few years ago Victoria Gerasimova published a microhistorical study about three Jewish merchants (Isai and Leonty Prezman, and Moise Haimovich) who insulted an orthodox priest Aleksey Orlov, in Tomsk (south-eastern Siberia). The case continued for four years (1858–1863). Despite the fact that the sources were incomplete because the story either escaped the attention of researchers, information was left out, materials were unknown or they had 'bribed false evidence',[117] Gerasimova's research nevertheless overcame the phenomenon of invisibilisation. The research outcomes were achieved through her study of *patterns of*

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[115] Kruger, *Wieg. Die Verhaal van Maria du Plessis*, 85–90.

[116] R. Moosage, 'Missing-ness, History and Apartheid-era Disappearances: The Figuring of Siphiwo Mthimkulu, Tobekile "Topsy" Madaka and Sizwe Kondile as Missing Dead Persons' (PhD dissertation, Department of History, University of the Western Cape, Bellville, and the Department of History, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, Sep. 2018), I, https://etd.uwc.ac.za/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11394/6640/moosage_phd_art_2018.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed= y, accessed 3 June 2023.

[117] V. Gerasimova, 'Century-Old Prejudice' and 'Siberian Mentality': 'Micro-History of the Mid-Nineteenth Century Case of Insulting the Priest Aleksey Orlov, by the Jews of Tomsk', *State Religion and Church in Russia and Worldwide* (2018), 2–5, https://www.academia.edu/86808290/_Century_Old_Prejudice_and_Siberian_Mentality_Micro_history_of_the_Mid_Nineteenth_Century_Case_of_Insulting_the_Priest_Aleksey_Orlov_by_the_Jews_of_Tomsk. DOI://https/doi.org/10.22394/2073-7203-2018-36-3-81-101. Translated with Academi.edu. (Academia Translation), assessed 5 Oct. 2022.

interaction between Jewish minorities and secular orthodox authorities at *different levels* and in *different groups* in Serbian society.[118]

As a further example, Ginzburg's grandfather was a professor at the University of Turin but was 'ejected in 1938 because he was a Jew'.[119] The young Ginzburg remembered that he returned at the time 'when the English tanks arrived in 1944'.[120] He often wrote about the 'invisible presence' of his father (who taught Russian at a young age) but refused to swear allegiance to the fascist regime.

In the diverse microhistory literature about the individual, is one outstanding theme that binds diverse views about them together. It is the common denominator of their invisibilisation. Diverse cultures reflect diverse forms of invisibilisation, and the converse is also true. Narratives about invisibilisation reinforce people as part of, and not apart from nature.[121] They are there. However, the lack of attention between the role of the individual and that of nature, is a dualism in need of future research.

A practical example of modern invisibilisation serves as an introduction to this phenomenon, is a case in Iceland. During her research in the Manuscript Department of the National and University Library in Reykjavík, Guðný Hallgrimsdóttir found that researchers overlooked many manuscripts that pertain to women because they were wrongly classified under a man's name. Some were filed among supernatural tales of ghosts and elves making

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[118] Ibid., 1.

[119] I. Dayeh, 'Philological Conversation. Philology and Microhistory: A Conversation with Carlo Ginzburg', *Philological Encounters*, 7 (2022), 201, https://www.academia.edu/78327367/Philology_and_Microhistory_A_Conversation_with_Carlo_Ginzburg, accessed 1 July 2022.

[120] Ibid.

[121] K. Friedman, P. Bridgewater, V. Agostini, T. Agardy, S. Arico, F. Bierman, K. Brown, I.D. Cresswell, E.C. Ellis, P. Failler, R.E. Kim, C. Pratt, J. Pice, V.S. Rivera and L. Teneva, 'The CBD Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework: People's Place within the rest of Nature', *Perspective. People in Nature*, (2022), 1475–85, DOI: 10.1002/pan3.10403, https://www.academia.edu/92358161/The_CBD_Post_2020_biodiversity_framework _Peoples_place_within_the_rest_of_nature_biodiversity_framework_Peoples_place_within_the_rest_of_nature, accessed 7 Dec. 2022.

them invisible in the manuscript catalogues.[122] Women were invisibilised simply because they were incorrectly classified[123] and were subjected to a state of namelessness.

In the current age of capitalist digitalisation the propensity 'for undermining the possibility of mobilising knowledge and legitimising practices in support of the interpretation of invisibilities in relation to inequalities and injustice […] brings about the invisibility of the real' and at the centre of this, is the individual.[124] It becomes an epistemic appropriation of technological development. The fundamental objective of modern digitalisation is to perpetuate future, and preserve present hegemonic capitalism.[125] Past invisibilisation reverberates into the present that gave rise to diverse manifestations of civil resistance.

Yet, it is the *discussion* of the above, that is important for microhistorians. Their approaches and methodologies unveil the broader meaning or semantic connotation to invisibility. Microhistorical approaches and methodologies require the awareness or knowledge, that invisibility is the result of uneven distribution and differences of inequality or power in society. All examples discussed from the literature reveal degrees of inequality and subservient relations to power. Matteo Stocchetti pointed out that relationships between inequalities and injustices are grounded in implicit ideas that concern the distribution of differences, the distribution of power and the (il)legitimacy of the association between them.[126] This implies that invisibilisation goes further than its technological means and enter three

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[122] G. Hallgrimsdóttir, *A Tale of a Fool? A Microhistory of an 18th-Century Peasant Woman.* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 1–2.

[123] For a broadly similar experience in a different context, see B. Klacsmann and A. Pető 'Exegi Monumentum: Monuments of Jews in Public Spaces in Budapest as Texts (1880–1944), *Immigrants and Minorities*, (Studies in Ethnicity, Migration and Diaspora), (25 Feb. 2024), 1–29, DOI: 10.1080/02619288.2024.2321340, https://doi.org/10.1080/02619288.2024.2321340, accessed 27 Feb. 2024.

[124] M. Stocchetti, 'Invisibility, Inequality and the Dialectics of the Real in the Digital Age', *Interações: Sociedade e as Novas Modernidades*, 34, (2018), 23, https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/872e/84fee09094dac4903a2fa6fb3f8a4a503efb.pdf, accessed 11 Dec. 2022.

[125] Ibid., 24.

[126] Ibid., 25.

domains: the domain of the individual, the social domain, and the epistemic domain.[127] Digital invisibilisation hides behind corporate ideology and all forms of power structures. This makes accessibility difficult for microhistorians to research their sources. It marginalises issues of social justice, sometimes under the vail of human rights, while formally endorsing the central position of the individual in society[128] in a dialectical manner. That is the individual's domain.

The significant feature is that hegemonic control through digital invisibilisation sparks paradoxically, social discontent. Suppression leads to social conflict and fuels accompanying radicalisation. Diverse types of digital isolation of resistance follows a downward spiral that ultimately disrupts the harmonious social production of civil society. The implication is that digital invisibilisation turns on itself. The side-lining of the individual, as seen throughout this study, leads to non-confirmative human civic behaviour. This represents the social domain.

The last domain is the epistemic domain. Stocchetti argues that in philosophical terms, the "real" describes what is true, authentic and which constitutes 'reality' and the 'grounds for the possibility of truth, knowledge and justice'.[129] The implication is that the invisibility of what is real is the outcome of ideological manipulation that has political consequences – it is based on the primacy of the political. One can conclude that invisibilisation eventually ends up in the political domain. Joel Anderson gave a philosophical explanation how this happens.

If I understand Anderson, he builds an argument of social struggle that demands more from justice which merely delivers on the fair and equitable distribution of scare resources. Even in justly adjudicated societies where the citizenry remain normatively short-changed, and were systematically denied the recognition that they deserve, be it from their worth of culture to personal status and the inviolability of their physical integrity, there that social theory that guides civic life, will have to pronounce on the motivation and must provide an account of

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[127] Ibid., 26.
[128] Ibid., 27–9.
[129] Ibid., 30, 32.

what justifies them. Within a society that justifies them a fully autonomous and individuated person can realise respect through the development of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem.[130] An example from the global south will suffice.

Historian, Michel Cahen explained during an interview that 'only the highest structures within FRELIMO were allowed to criticise the government'[131] within a captured party-nation riddled with 'structural fraud'.[132] In line with this and for the remainder of this study, invisibilisation of all forms of exclusions from societal structures could best be described as structural invisibilisation. The recent widely publicised exclusion of female students from Afghan education, is probably the most suitable twenty- first- century example of structural invisibilisation. Dorothee M. Kellou's research shows how 3,3 million Algerian Muslims displaced by the French military illustrates the history of re-groupment resettlement, were caught up in the web of French power which they had to challenge from within.[133]

It is for the above reasons that this study proposes that the concept of invisibilisation be added to the list of microhistorical characteristics as an analytic category under the rubric of, for instance, state capture historiography. The reason for including the following example is to shift the microhistorical approach higher up on the history research agendas, including being able to make positive contributions to the *study of violentology*[134] in South Africa. This

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[130] J. Anderson, 'Translator's Introduction', in A. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammer of Social Conflicts*. Translated by J. Anderson. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Polity Press, 1995), x, xi.

[131] F. Guilengue, 'Mozambique is Suffering a Military Expression of a Political Problem. An Interview with Historian Michel Cahen for the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation Southern Africa', International Politics, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (01/2016), 1, https://www.academia.edu/75058704/Mozambique_is_Suffering_a_Military_Expression_of_a_Political_Problem_an_Interview_with_Historian_Michel_Cahen_for_the_Rosa_Luxemburg_Foundation_Southern_Africa, accessed 20 Jan. 2023.

[132] Ibid., 7.

[133] D.M. Kellou, 'A Microhistory of the Forced Resettlement of the Algerian Muslim Population During the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962): Mansourah, Kabylia' (MA thesis, Arab Studies, Georgetown University, Georgetown, 2012), iii, iv, https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/557506/Kellou_georgetown_0076M_11824.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed, accessed 30 Dec. 2022.

[134] J.O. Newman, *Benjamin's Library. Modernity, Nation and the Baroque.* (Ithaca, New York: A Signale Book. Cornell University Press and Cornell University Library, 2011), xiv.

proposal is to support the idea of producing an integrated microhistorical approach to violentology. Closely related is the idea of a German tradition of a nation that took a turn for the worse[135] during the rise of Nazism, the Second World War, and into a Neo-Cold War period. Central to these is the theme of persecution. If this is the 'politics of periodisation',[136] then invisibilisation became is its philosophy. This leads to Adnan Z. Morshed's term of the paradox of invisibility, and argues 'that microhistory can serve as a powerful historiographic antidote to the dehumanizing effects of invisibility.'[137] A subaltern person today might not be subaltern a few months later. Kruger's biography-in-context shows that Maria rose above most forms of subaltern invisibilising.

By 1680, the religious persecutions in Europe became intolerable. Kruger wrote that Protestants were not only subjected to silence; they had to become invisible.[138] People settled in Switzerland, Germany, England, Scotland, Ireland, the Netherlands, America and South Africa.

The fact that the immediate micro-community disintegrated, and the traces of humans went dead after Maria passed away equally appears inconsequential. Future invisibilisation of the slaves whose steps now ended, symbolises a non-future known existence, unlike the naming of the pots that were in reality not inconsequential.

The above few paragraphs show the productive nature and application of the microhistorical method. The intensive investigation of clues can assist to explain an individual as agency and combat the phenomenon of invisibility. In this respect, micro-analysis and

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[135] Ibid., 3.
[136] Ibid., xiv.
[137] A.Z. Morshed, 'The Paradox of Invisibility. Teaching Architectural History', *Journal of Architectural Education*, 76, 2 (2022), 83, DOI: 10.1080/10464883.2022.2097517, https://doi.org/10.1080/10464883.2022.2097517, accessed 12 Feb. 2023.
[138] Kruger, *Wieg. Die Verhaal van Maria du Plessis*, 12.

micro-history both refer to the analytic perspective of research, not to the real or symbolic dimensions of its subject.[139]

Most of what is needed for this study about the phenomenon of invisibilisation were already covered. In *Wieg. Die Verhaal van Maria* is a biography-in-context, this theme takes on a specific and surprising turn. The clue lies in the Foreword of *Wieg*.[140] Context helps to make narrative clear, but paradoxically, can also enhance invisibilisation.

Maria's youth was a period of invisibility, but once involved in the local church life at the Cape, Maria and Jean became *more* visible. They regularly attended church services, baptisms and funerals of all people across societal divisions.

While domestic and gender-based violence are by definition mostly confined to the homes (as crime scenes, really) and thus invisibilised, Maria's medical care work often placed her in the middle of violent and emotion-filled situations. Pregnant mothers out of wedlock would not readily reveal the identity of the father, yet, Maria ended up with confessions. Confessions turned invisibilisation around. At the times, the Political Council at the Cape intervened and societal violence were exposed when they became public or un-invisibilised. Maria's reports brought the hidden (invisibilised) facts into the open.

In a study about the South African War of 1899–1902, Johan Wasserman researched the spirituality and memorialisation of the dead in concentration camps of Durban from a microhistorical perspective.[141] Spirituality and memorialisation served as tools to un-invisibilise potentially forgotten war sacrifices and associate deaths.

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[139] C. Ginzburg, 'Some Comments on the Discussion at the Academia dei Lincei', *Cromhos*, (Cyber Review of Modern Historiography), 18 (2013), 128–30.

[140] Kruger, *Wieg. Die Verhaal van Maria du Plessis*, vii.

[141] J. Wassermann, 'Spirituality and the Memorialisation of the Dead of the Durban Concentration Camps During the South African War (1899–1902) – A Micro History', *Pharos Journal of Theology*, ISSN 2414 online 102, special edition, 1 (2021), 1–11, https://www.pharosjot.com/uploads/7/1/6/3/7163688/theme_5_article_18_se1_2021_wassermann_spirituality_and_the_memorialisation.pdf, accessed 29 May 2022.

The relevance of Wasserman's study is for a number of reasons. It reveals how the application of the microhistorical approach and its methods are productive for studying the past. It also shows an increasing shift in microhistory to focus on the study of emotions – one of the most recent trends in microhistory. This observation goes to diversity of debates, themes and methods. It places critiques of microhistory under a powerful microscope. If this study is read in conjunction with earlier research outcomes by Wassermann, it show the relatively close proximity of the application of empirical case study research to the microhistorical approach, debates, and methods.

Wasserman's theory and method function at the intersection between death, memorialisation and gender.[142] The death of

> more than 26 000 Boer civilians […] left a deep scar of the Afrikaner psyche and identity. Large numbers of Africans also died in the mentioned camps but, owing to the racialised nature of the recordkeeping by the British authorities, there are no reliable statistics.[143]

Wasserman employed Martin Heidegger's concept of death as a social inconvenience, and applied it to the Durban Concentration Camp inhabitants who passed away *in non-combat situations* that shows that the dead were sources of inconvenience to the British and Boers authorities.[144] This study provides opportunities to introduce the concept of invisibilisation and agrees with Wassermann, that '[m]ethodologically speaking, this study drew on micro-history to answer a large historical question memorialisation of the dead in a small space […] in an attempt to understand the agency of the memorialisers.'[145]

This links well to larger conceptualisatons of invisibilisation, particularly in the absence of recordkeeping, as was discussed earlier in this study about the *Tale of a Fool?*[146]

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[142] Ibid., 30.
[143] Ibid., 2.
[144] Ibid., 3.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Hallgrimsdóttir, *A Tale of a Fool?*

Wassermann's study reveals how landscape has affected the socio-enviro structure of people who inhabit a particular area. That people are seen as more than just bodies, seem to point at access to subaltern societies in order to understand their lives from below. In this context, Daniele Valisena and Marco Armiero argues that bodies turn into methodological and epistemological sites[147] as analytical categories for microhistorical methodology.

In 2007, Wassermann published research results of a small-scale survey which quantitatively determined the historical consciousness amongst Afrikaner adolescents. An interesting and unexpected research result was that local history (of the city or province) attracted little interest compared to other variables. Respondents preferred "meta narratives" instead of the microhistory of everyday events or regions.'[148] This appears to be a contra microhistory paradox that rather ties to the macro-link of microhistory.

The same was a case about slavery. Slavery invisibilises sudden and cruel practises when slave victims were stolen from their immediate life-worlds, and sold into new unknown ones. It is not the removal of people but surprisingly, the antiphony of invisibilisation, its emotional raptures, the lack of slave voices, value, worth, self-esteem and alienation from their worlds, which are at the core of the argument, because they had no agency.

Against Alex Honneth's thinking[149] by the time of the rebellion the introduction of new commercial practices, capabilities of elementary publishing and production into the domains

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[147] D. Valisena and M. Armiero, 'Coal Lives. Body, Work and Memory Among Italian Miners in Wallonia, Belgium', in A. Marco and R. Tucker, eds*., Environmental History of Modern Migration.* (New York and London: Routledge, 2017), 91, https://www.academia.edu/33209452/Coal_lives_body_work_and_memory_among_Italian_miners_in_Wallonia_Belgium, accessed 15 Jan. 2022.

[148] J. Wassermann, 'The Historical Consciousness of Afrikaner Adolescents – A Small Scale Survey', *Yesterday and Today*, 1 (2007), 34, 42, http://sashtw.org.za/WP/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Johan%20Wasserman%20groter%20referaat.pdf, accessed 5 Mar. 2019.

[149] A. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammer of Social Conflicts.* Translated by J. Anderson. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Polity Press, 1995), 8.

of the political economic and economic framework of traditional morals, they could no longer be normatively sustained as virtuous behaviour.

While acts of rebellion of 1705 against Governor Van der Stel were often conducted and suppressed in secret, much of it was in full public view. The executions, the display of the torture process, including the display of a human heads on a pole in public space, make an important epistemological contribution to the concept of invisibilisation. Parading a human head, Michel Foucault wrote, is a repressive apparatus of power in relation to the masses.[150] Concepts such as invisibilisation can take on more than just a traditional cloak-and-dagger perspective. The concept itself can be seen as an actor in an ever-changing reality where the lines of demarcation between the central and periphery, become blurred. Invisibilisation now takes on a new dimension. Foucault once referred to the practice of the police working in secretive circumstances to make things visible, become itself invisible.[151] In a very paradoxical manner, as the wife to a 'Kaapse chirurgyn', Maria was by association, no freer than slave women[152] at the Cape. Through her marital standing, Maria became a 'full member' to the associated past. Her inherited past was a legally gender inferior one, a negative judicial one.[153]

The traditional conceptualisation of invisibilisation changes to a temporal one, away from the previous belief of its remoteness from mainstream views and actions to a creative and inspirational centre. It takes on a political characteristic of moving from the periphery of the dark, hidden geographical areas including those of behind-closed-door-spaces, to the centre, in the public domain, open for everyone to see and experience. It appears in interesting and unexpected places that contribute as laboratories of valuable ideas.[154]

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[150] M. Foucault, *POWER/KNOWLEDGE*. *Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977.* Edited by Colin Gordon. Translated by Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham and Kate Soper. (New York: Pantheon Books), 6, 26.
[151] Ibid., 71.
[152] Kruger, *Maria. Die Verhaal van Maria du Plessis*, 166.
[153] Foucault, *POWER/KNOWLEDGE*, 201.
[154] R. Goleşteanu, Book review of: R. Nemes, *Another Hungary. The Nineteenth-Century Provinces in Eight Lives*. (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 2016), *Stanford Studies*

In the expanded concept of the invisible, the debate has moved on from the traditional debate of the primacy of political, race, and class-forms-of-invisibilisation, or, official invisibilisation, to everyday social and other interest groups in literally 'making silence heard again'. The collective resistance of women in the 1705 revolt, stood the possibility of missing an opportunity and lose their struggle as a strategy for recognition and hopefully to become visible again, as they should have been. Their struggle for recognition dominated the political domain specifically in 1705. Theirs was a form of emancipatory critique and action within ordinary human experiences rather than in the revolutionary theory of their intellectuals. They faced a situation of the namelessness of their identity. Their striving for re-cognition resonates with re-identification as a positive state-shift. Any form of negating this, is to dis-respect. At an epistemological level, respect is a 'vital human need',[155] a basic human right. The normative ideals for a just society is empirically confirmed by historical struggles for recognition thus, in the primacy of the political domain.

In the case of Maria as an agent of counter-invisibilisation, she moved on, carving a life of status and did not take sides in the rebellion of 1705. Paradoxically, her status drove invisibilisation away and brought her social and financial standing. A visible individual with agency where microhistory intersects with a biography-in context, where her re-identification and the granting of a certain status[156] were inseparable. If one follows Davis, then Kruger 'wrenched [Maria's story] from its historical context […] in the tradition of Women Worthies'[157] and placed it where it really belongs: in a biography-in-context.[158]

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on Central and Eastern Europe, in Acta Poloniae Historica, (2018), 269–80, https://www.academia.edu/37595530/Review_to_Robert_Nemes_Another_Hungary._The_Nineteenth_Century_Provinces_in_Eight_Lives, accessed 22 Jan. 2023.

[155] Anderson, 'Translator's Introduction', xiii, x.

[156] Ibid., viii.

[157] N.Z. Davis, '"Women's History" in Transition: The European Case'*, Feminist Studies*, 3, 3/4, (Spring – Summer 1976), 83, https://www.academia.edu/37222809/Natalie_Zemon_Davis_Women_s_History_in_Transition_The_European_Case_Feminist_Studies_3_3_4_Spring_Summer_1976_83_103, accessed 15 Mar. 2023.

[158] Kruger*, Wieg. Die Verhaal van Maria du Plessis*, vii.

Conclusion

Much of the above descriptions and conceptualisations regarding the traditional microhistorical view of the weak, downtrodden, marginalised, poor and those who had fallen on hard times in their societies, have taken a 'paradoxical turn' through the eventual part-release of the treasure trove of the *Epstein Files*-saga.

Microhistory, with its current lock-stock-and-barrel theories and methods, is well-suited to intensely study the 'Big Men- and Women-history', the 'Big Boys' Lies' and to un-invisibilise the findings of about 500 redacted (or sanitised) pages from the FBI's (dubbed: Fraudulent Brothers's Institute) main report. Many magnifying glasses or microscopes, and forensic acumen can expect a call-up to play their part. Thus, there is a paradoxical analogy between where *microstoria* started, now almost fifty years ago, and were microhistorical research outcomes are today, and also between its status today and suggestions, discussions and disagreements about its current theoretical form. What can be hypothesised is that Big Men/Women history probably never left the history writing scene – a good look at local bookshop, tends to support this view. The point is that science (and history) can only be understood epistemologically, as long as knowledge is not equated with absolute knowledge. This negate worries about 'I do not know' or shades of fundamental undecidedness since there can be no absolutes in any historical genre.

While there will always be critics, we have seen that some scholars argue that historians have not yet developed a comprehensive and conclusive definition for the term 'microhistory.' From one perspective, Nigel Worden maintains that 'microhistorians can be more aware of what their work want to shed light on'.[159] This is a realistic request to answer: Price's quotation from Ronald Hoffman, is the following: 'Microhistory advocates the study of the ordinary as

[159] N. Worden, 'After Race and Class: Recent Trends in the Historiography of Early Modern Cape Society', *South African Historical Journal*, 62, 3 (2010), 589.

well as the extraordinary, the fringe as well as the centre, looking at specific places, people or events that illustrate or explain larger themes in macro history.'[160] And from a pro perspective, Andrew C. Thompson stated his positive experience clearly: '[I]n all of my readings, I never came across a historian who was unsure of how he or she defines microhistory.'[161]

The apparent lack of a comprehensive definition of microhistory, the study of the ordinary as the extraordinary at the fringes or the centre, became paradoxically interesting if we accept that in light of the study of a biography-in-context, then maybe, autobiographies would be better suited to fill the gaps. This is an epistemological dilemma with practical implications.

In general, the characteristics of microhistory can (but not without criticism) be listed as follows: The reduction of scale[162] into smaller well-defined objects of study[163] to such extent that the intensity of the investigation into the detail, minute or even trivial clues[164] for research, draw criticism. Whether Big Historical Questions[165] can (empirically) or should (normatively) be framed and answered based on the small, does not sit well with all theorists of microhistory. Neither does the distinction and certainty as if microhistory is an autonomous field of study or

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[160] S.L. Price, 'The Lewellings; A Microhistory of Family Farming and Agricultural Development in California, 1850–2010' (MA thesis, Somona University, 2011), 8, https://scholarworks.calstate.edu/downloads/z029p534q, accessed 12 Dec. 2022.

[161] A.C. Thompson, 'Conrad Eymann: A Microhistory of Changing German-Canadian Identity During the First World War' (MA thesis, Graduate College of Bowling Green State University, Aug. 2010), 4, https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_etd/send_file/send?accession=bgsu1276989758&disposition=inline, accessed 26 June 2023.

[162] C. Ginzburg, 'Microhistory: Two or Three Things I Know About it', *Critical Inquiry,* 20 (Autumn 1993), 10–35. Translated by John and Anne Tedeschi. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249105639_Microhistory_Two_or_Three_Things_That_I_Know_about_It, accessed 20 July 2020.

[163] E. Le Roy Ladurie*, Montaillou. The Promised Land of Error*. Translated by B. Bray. (New York: George Braziller, 1978).

[164] F. Trivellato, 'The Paradoxes of Global History', *Cromoths*, *Cyber Review of Modern Historiography,* https://oajournals.fupress.net/index.php/cromohs/trivellato, accessed 3 Jan. 2026.

[165] S.G. Magnússon, 'The Singularization of History: Social History and Microhistory within the Postmodern State of Knowledge.' (An un-refereed author version of an article) published in [*Journal of Social History*], (Spring) 36, 3 (2003), 701–35.], 1–32, https://www.academia.edu/5196062/The_Singularization_of_History_Social_History_and_Microhistory_within_the_Postmodern_State_of_Knowledge_Journal_of_Social_History_2003, accessed 10 June 2020.

a complementary junior parter[166] to larger conceptualisations of history, that preclude scholars from going forward. The spirited harvesting the exceptional normal[167] still yields productive research results as are the uses of clues[168] of all sorts, when sources are lacking. The expansive use of the concept of *finis*[169] leads to new levels and distances that reach out very far.[170] These continue to tie in well with efforts to overcome criticisms about the problematic micro-macro link. It represents the multiplicity of ideas that there are also other interpretations. Whether the efforts are to use puzzles or fractals[171] isolating the research through a process of singularisation,[172] does not kill microhistory's spirit of experimentation[173] or the role and position of the individual as agency[174] to fill the historiographical and research gaps.[175] Rather, these efforts should be recognised and respected as a vital human need[176] for pushing back at traditional interpretations and criticism that microhistory has been confined to corners of methodology-talk[177] precisely at a time when it is defended for having created its own distinctive methods and theories.[178] One such theory is the 'term ''circularity'' between the culture of the dominant classes and that of the subordinate classes […] in preindustrial

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[166] Szijártó, 'The Paths of Microhistory', 917–27.
[167] C. Ginzburg, 'Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm', in C. Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths and the Historical Method*. Translated by John and Anne C. Tedeschi, with a new preface. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 78–113.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Szijártó, 'Probing the Limits of Microhistory', 193–98.
[170] Ibid.
[171] I.M. Szijártó, 'Puzzle, Fractal, Mosaic. Thoughts on Microhistory', *Journal of Microhistory*, (2008), 1–7, https://www.academia.edu/389075/Puzzle_fractal_mosaic._Thoughts_on_microhistory, accessed 19 Mar. 2023.
[172] Magnússon, 'The Singularization of History'.
[173] R. Bertrand, and G. Calafat, 'Global Microhistory: Case(s) to Follow (*Annales HSS*, 2019), [2023], 5, https://www.academia.edu/39727485/La_microhistoire_globale_affaire_s_%C3%A0_suivre_Annales_HSS_2019, (translated by R. Bertrand with Academia.edu, from 'La microhistoire globale: affaire(s) à suivre' (Annales HSS, 2019), accessed 12 July 2023.
[174] M. Horkheimer, *Eclipse or Reason*. Second edition. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
[175] Davis, 'The Historian and Literary Uses', 21–3.
[176] Anderson, 'Translator's Introduction', xiii, x.
[177] Simon, 'Method and Perspective', 2.
[178] I.M. Szijártó, 'The Paths of Microhistory', *Quaderna storici* 159 / a. LIII, n. 3,dicembre (2018), 917, DOI: 10. 1408/94603, https//www.rivisteweb.it/doi.10.1408/94603, accessed 5 June 2020.

Europe.'[179] While context compromises meaning,[180] the practice of going-back-to-go-forward,[181] or the identification of three historiographical waves[182] striving that no-one is left behind or, as the Walter Benjamin wrote: Nothing that has taken place should be lost to history',[183] and the focus on a pre-scientific phase of microhistory, all continue to make up the rich characteristics of microhistory. And it is to the above list that this study proposes that the concepts of invisibilisation,[184] paradox,[185] and connectedness[186] be moved higher up on the research agenda of microhistory's contemporary characteristics.

From the bulk of this study, four paradoxes in microhistory, can be identified for consideration:

First, we part-define microhistory satisfactorily, yet it is a *popular* historical genre; second, we part-define microhistory satisfactorily, yet it is *taught/researched* formally and informally; third, we part-define microhistory satisfactorily, yet we employ pro and contra *debates*; last, we part-define microhistory satisfactorily, yet we use *conceptualities* to debate its pros and cons.

The characteristics listed above, can be assigned to these four (there might be many more) paradoxes as frameworks for further research and debate, to spheres in microhistory that need more research and more debate, not because of critique, but because of the opportunities awaiting. The focus has changed *from which* big names asking the Big Historical Questions, *to what* they say, is what appears to be the driving forces for retaining future research interest.

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[179] Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, xx.
[180] E. Muir, 'Introduction: Observing Trifles', in Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero, eds., *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe*. Translated by Eren Branch. *Selections from Quaderni storici*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), xi.
[181] Gwinn, 'Going Back to go Forward', 3.
[182] M. Peltonen, 'Clues, Margins and Monads: The Micro-Macro Link in Historical Research', *History and Theory*. *Studies in the Philosophy of History*, 40, 3 (2001), 347.
[183] Gundersen, 'On the Dark Side of History', 1–12.
[184] Dragolea, Book review of: Andrea Pető, *The Women of the Arrow Cross Party: Invisible Hungarian Perpetrators.*
[185] Trivellato, 'The Paradoxes of Global History'.
[186] Ghobrial, 'The Secret Life of Elias of Babylon', 52– 93.

Acknowledgement

As always, I wish (and need) to thank Rita Engelbrecht for her support and constructive suggestions throughout this project. And as usual, the shortcomings remain mine.

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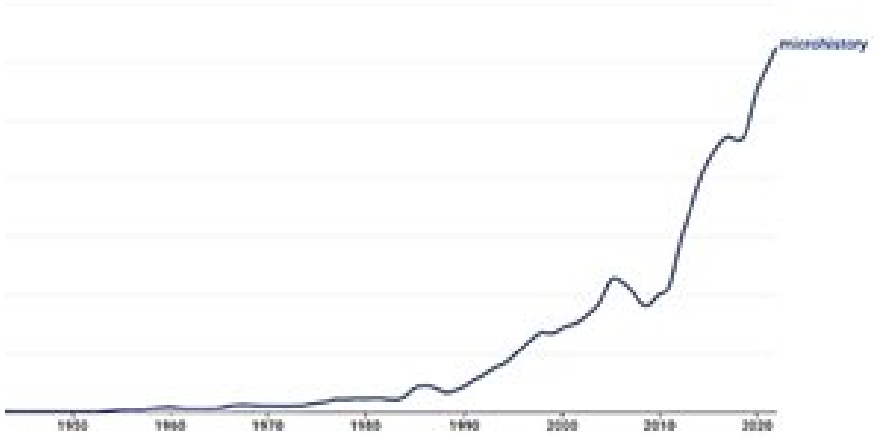
Addendum

Display of a user-selected word 'microhistory' (in this instance), or phrases (NGram) in a graph that shows how the word or phrase have occurred in a corpus.



Source: Google Books, NGram Viewer: ‘Microhistory’, English, (Smoothing of 3), 1950–2022, accessed 5 Jan. 2026.